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RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 6034  
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 3060  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 2132  
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0836  
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0204  
RUEHPF/AMEMBASSY PHNOM PENH PRIORITY 0072  
RUEHJA/AMEMBASSY JAKARTA PRIORITY 0562  
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY 2955  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 4492  
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 6587  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 COLOMBO 000697

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/26/2016  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PHUM](#) [CE](#)  
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: PRESIDENT CONFIRMS MILITARY OPERATIONS  
OVER--FOR NOW; LISTENS TO CHARGE' SUGGEST WAYS TO ADDRESS  
TAMIL UNHAPPINESS

REF: COLOMBO 686

Classified By: James F. Entwistle, Charge' d'Affaires, a.i. Reason: 1  
.4 (b,d).

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SUMMARY  
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¶1. (C) In an April 27 meeting with President Mahinda Rajapaksa, Charge' condemned the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) April 25 attempt on the life of the Army Commander and underscored strong US support for Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) efforts to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Commending the President's appeal for tolerance in his April 25 address to the nation, Charge' urged the GSL to publicize more vigorously its efforts to address Tamil grievances and, in order to avoid exacerbating communal tensions, to be more transparent about the reasons for cordon-and-search operations. The President confirmed that military operations had ceased but indicated a possible resumption in the event of further Tiger aggression. Peace Secretariat Head Palitha Kohona said that the GSL offer of a

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seaplane to transport LTTE cadres from the east to the north (a Tiger precondition of resumed dialogue in Geneva) is still on the table. End summary.

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MILITARY OPS OVER FOR NOW;  
LTTE TRANSPORT STILL UNDER CONSIDERATION  
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¶2. (C) Charge' met with President Mahinda Rajapaksa on April 27. Foreign Secretary H.M.G.S. Palihakkara and Government of Sri Lanka (GSL) Peace Secretariat head Palitha Kohona also participated. (The President had convoked members of the diplomatic corps for a series of individual meetings that

day. The Japanese Ambassador's meeting followed Charge's.) Charge' opened the meeting by expressing condolences for the victims of the abortive April 25 Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) assassination attempt on Army Commander Lt. General Sarath Fonseka. He added that local police in Oklahoma, at Fonseka's wish, had checked on the safety and security of the Army Commander's two daughters who are living there. Citing A/S Boucher's April 26 interview (which received prominent coverage in the state-owned press here), Charge' reiterated the US' firm support for GSL efforts to resolve the conflict peacefully. He noted that the US is looking for additional ways to be helpful, including marshalling international cooperation on interdicting LTTE financing and weapons procurement. Such efforts might go beyond the purview of the Co-chairs, he said, but the question of how to enlist broader international support will be discussed at the April 28 Co-chairs meeting in Oslo. In addition, the US delegation planned to raise the need for international cooperation to interdict LTTE weapons procurement at the ASEAN Regional Forum meeting in Beijing this week, he added. Finally, the US is also considering what further military assistance might be provided.

13. (C) Rajapaksa thanked the US for its strong support. Noting reports that a ship bearing LTTE arms was on its way to Sri Lanka from somewhere in Southeast Asia, he reported that the GSL had sent two special delegations to Thailand and Cambodia to ask those governments' assistance in interdicting weapons. Foreign Secretary Palihakkara described the two governments' responses as "very supportive," but indicated that "private sector deals" and "lots of money changing hands" were complicating factors.

14. (C) The President confirmed that military operations

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against the LTTE April 25-26 (which he said had been in response to LTTE firing against GSL military targets) had ceased. Should the Tigers launch further attacks against the GSL, however, retaliatory operations might resume, he indicated. (Note: A claymore mine attack in the northern district of Jaffna killed two Sri Lanka Navy sailors on April 27. There was no news of GSL retaliation after this attack. End note.) That said, the GSL continues to seek ways to resume dialogue with the Tigers in Geneva. Peace Secretariat head Palitha Kohona confirmed that the offer of a Sri Lankan Airlines seaplane to transport eastern LTTE cadres to the north (their travel is a Tiger precondition for attending talks in Geneva) was still on the table and being worked by the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM). (Note: When Norwegian Ambassador Hans Brattskar had his meeting with Rajapaksa a few hours after the Charge's, the President's first question was whether the LTTE had responded to this offer.)

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HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE GETTING UNDERWAY  
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15. (C) Charge' asked about the status of humanitarian assistance to victims of the conflict in Trincomalee and other areas (Reftel). He noted that the closure of access points to LTTE-controlled territories after the Fonseka assassination attempt might endanger innocent people. Palihakkara and Kohona asserted that humanitarian aid was being coordinated by the Government Agent in Trincomalee. (The A9 highway from Vavuniya and Jaffna reopened on April 27, as did the road from Trincomalee to Batticaloa in the east. ICRC told us it regained access to LTTE-controlled areas on April 27.)

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ADDRESS TAMIL GRIEVANCES;  
PUBLICIZE ASSISTANCE EFFORTS;  
CUT OFF KARUNA  
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16. (C) The Charge' commended the President's April 25 televised address to the nation, wherein he stressed the unity of all Sri Lankans and urged that all Sri Lankans refrain from communal violence (Reftel). Noting that friends sometimes had to raise unwelcome subjects, the Charge' said that along with legitimate GSL efforts to boost security and guard against further Tiger aggression, it will be important that the GSL publicize what it is doing to address Tamil grievances and ensure an end to discrimination. The Charge' raised an April 27 press report of GSL compensation to the families of Sinhalese farmers murdered by the LTTE as an example of a perceived double standard that infuriates Tamils. It is right that the GSL assist the families of the Sinhalese killed, but where are the press reports of GSL assistance to the families of Tamil victims of mob violence on April 12 and 21 or of GSL efforts to rebuild the Tamil homes and businesses destroyed the same days? Why not publicly announce what the GSL is doing to help those Tamils? Silence is taken by Tamils as indifference.

17. (C) Acknowledging the need for the GSL to increase security, the Charge' suggested that the Government be more transparent about reasons for cordon-and-sweep operations in Colombo, adding that such openness would help deflate exaggerated suspicions and wild speculation that a return to 1983-style violence was imminent. Charge' said that the US does not believe that this is the case, but the fears are there nonetheless.

18. (C) Beyond that, the Charge' continued, the GSL needed

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to address publicly Tamil perceptions that Tamils can be killed with impunity in GSL-controlled territory. For example, the murders of five Tamil students in Trincomalee in January, reportedly by the police Special Task Force, had faded from public view, with no indication that a serious investigation was under way.

19. (C) Turning to controlling paramilitaries, Charge' told the President that the perception is widespread among Tamils that the GSL is letting "armed groups" in GSL-controlled territory run rampant. "Look what happened to Douglas," the President smiled in reply. (Comment: Douglas Devananda is the leader of the Eelam People's Democratic Party, an anti-LTTE paramilitary organization disarmed under the Ceasefire Agreement. Since then, many of its members have been assassinated by the LTTE. GSL interlocutors often cite the EPDP's unhappy fate whenever disarming Karuna is raised. End comment.) "I've given a clear message that no armed groups can operate in cleared areas," Rajapaksa asserted. The President said he has given orders to the security forces to search the homes and offices of known Karuna members in GSL-controlled territories for weapons, with instructions that any weapons so found should be confiscated. (He did not say if any of these searches had been conducted, however, and if so, if any weapons had been found.) The problem is that no one can tell the difference between a Karuna member, an LTTE cadre or the average citizen, he continued. The President added that in early April he had challenged Norwegian International Development Minister Erik Solheim to identify any paramilitary actions or killings that had taken place since the first round of talks in Geneva in February, "and he couldn't do it." Rajapaksa noted, however, that he has not restricted the Karuna faction's "political activities" in GSL-held territory; "could I do that in a democratic country?"

110. (C) The Charge noted that a recent Australian TV piece in which a journalist apparently found armed Karuna cadres near the eastern district of Batticaloa with ease had reinforced the perception that the GSL wasn't trying too hard to meet its Geneva commitments. Again, why not get ahead of the public relations curve by publicly outlining GSL efforts post-Geneva rather than remain on the defensive?

¶11. (C) As evidence of Rajapaksa's concern for Tamil sentiments, Palihakkara noted that even after Fonseka's assassination attempt, Rajapaksa had decided against reintroducing special powers of arrest and detention under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (PTA). The President added that he had appointed a special team to investigate the April 7 killing of Tamil National Alliance (TNA) MP-appointee V. Vigneswaran in Trincomalee. So far, however, the police had been unable to uncover any leads, he reported. After he pointed out to Solheim in early April that no killings had taken place in GSL-controlled territory since the first round of talks in Geneva, Vigneswaran was killed just two days later, the President stated, hinting that the LTTE killed the TNA appointee to make the GSL look bad. Whoever is behind Vigneswaran's killing and that of TNA MP Joseph Pararajasingham in Batticaloa on December 24 does not support the GSL, he asserted, since both slayings directly contravened GSL interests.

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CIVILIANS IN CHARGE?  
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¶12. (C) The Charge' asked the President if he were confident that civilian control of the military was solid, both in terms of this week's military action and alleged military ties to the paramilitaries. Rajapaksa seemed initially

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confused by the question but, after consulting with Palihakkara and Kohona in Sinhalese, said yes--certainly at the top levels in Colombo--although he couldn't be held responsible "for every sergeant in the field."

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COMMENT  
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¶13. (C) Rajapaksa clearly appreciated the assurance of support and didn't bridle visibly at the less welcome messages about the need for the GSL to get out ahead of the perception curve in rebutting the common belief among many Tamils that the GSL is at best indifferent to their concerns.

We will need to continue this two-pronged message in the weeks and months ahead: that we stand ready to help a democratic friend in its struggle against terror but it must take tough steps to address its own shortcomings when it comes to the Tamil community.

ENTWISTLE